

CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP: NEED AND NATURE

I Perennial Naturalism

According to the first perspective, there is no God, and we human beings are insignificant parts of a giant cosmic machine that proceeds in majestic indifference to us, our hopes and aspirations, our needs and desires, our sense of fairness or fittingness.

II Postmodernism or Anti-realism With Respect to Truth

According to the second perspective, on the other hand, it is we ourselves--we human beings--who are responsible for the basic structure of the world.

Protagoras: man is the measure of all things ; Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.

Some complications

relativism with respect to truth, intellectual *anomie*, a blooming, buzzing confusion

Dr. Faustus in effect says, "Man is the measure of all things; I am a man; therefore I am the measure of all things."

III ARE SCIENCE AND SCHOLARSHIP NEUTRAL?

- (1) Richard Rorty's notion that truth is what my peers will let me get away with saying.
- (2) Evolution and the claim that human beings are not designed

Richard Dawkins:

All appearances to the contrary, the only watchmaker in nature is the blind forces of physics, albeit deployed in a very special way. A true watchmaker has foresight: he designs his cogs and springs, and plans their interconnections, with a future purpose in his mind's eye. Natural selection, the blind, unconscious automatic process which Darwin discovered, and which we now know is the explanation for the existence and apparently purposeful form of all life, has no purpose in mind. It has no mind and no mind's eye. It does not plan for the future. It has no vision, no foresight, no sight at all. If it can be said to play the role of watchmaker in nature, it is the *blind* watchmaker (Dawkins 1986, p. 5).

- (3) David Sloan Wilson's theory of religion

I claim that a knowledge of the details (of Calvin's Geneva) clearly supports a group-level functional interpretation of Calvinism. Calvinism is an interlocking system with a purpose: to unify and coordinate a population of people to achieve a common set of goals by collective action. The goals may be difficult to define precisely, but they certainly included what Durkheim referred to as secular utility--the basic goods and services that all people need and

want, inside and outside of religion (118).

In the first place, much religious belief is not detached from reality Rather, it is intimately connected to reality by motivating behaviors that are adaptive in the real world--an awesome achievement when we appreciate the complexity that is required to become connected in this practical sense. It is true that many religious beliefs are false as literal description of the real world, but this merely forces us to recognize two forms of realism: a factual realism based on literal correspondence and a practical realism based on behavioral adaptiveness.

In the second place, much religious belief does not represent a form of mental weakness but rather the healthy functioning of the biologically and culturally well-adapted mind. . . . Adaptation is the gold standard against which rationality must be judged, along with all other forms of thought. Evolutionary biologists should be especially quick to grasp this point because they appreciate that the well-adapted mind is ultimately an organ of survival and reproduction. . . . factual realists detached from practical reality were not among our ancestors (p. 228).

(4) Herbert Simon's theory in "A Mechanism for Social Selection and Successful Altruism"

(A paradigm of rational behavior, so conceived, was reported in the South Bend Tribune of December 21, 1991 (dateline Alexandria (Va.)): "Cecil B. Jacobson, an infertility specialist, was accused of using his own sperm to impregnate his patients; he may have fathered as many as 75 children, a prosecutor said Friday.")

Docile persons tend to learn and believe what they perceive others in the society want them to learn and believe. Thus the content of what is learned will not be fully screened for its contribution to personal fitness (p. 1666).

Because of bounded rationality, the docile individual will often be unable to distinguish socially prescribed behavior that contributes to fitness from altruistic behavior [i. e., socially prescribed behavior that does not contribute to fitness--AP]. In fact, docility will reduce the inclination to evaluate independently the contributions of behavior to fitness. . . . By virtue of bounded rationality, the docile person cannot acquire the personally advantageous learning that provides the increment, d , of fitness without acquiring also the altruistic behaviors that cost the decrement, c (p. 1667).

IV So what should Christians do?

(1) Cultural Criticism

(2) Positive Christian scholarship

V An Objection

But why think so?

Conditionalization: If F then S